



USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Template Version 2.09

Voluntary Report – FAS internal use only

Date: 3/1/2006

GAIN Report Number: UK6008

United Kingdom

Poultry and Products

UK - Avian Influenza Update

2006

Approved by:

Besa L. Kotati
U.S. Embassy

Prepared by:

Steve R. Knight

Report Highlights:

While acknowledging that it is increasingly likely that avian influenza will be found in the UK in the future, the UK Government continues to emphasize that it has a highly detailed contingency plan in place to control and eradicate any such outbreak. As vaccination begins in parts of France, the UK Government has re-iterated that it does not favor widespread vaccination of poultry but has not totally ruled it out. It has also responded to pressure from the organic sector to clarify the status of free range birds should compulsory indoor housing be introduced. Contrary to the situation in some other Member States, UK consumer purchases of poultry meat remain undiminished despite the wide media coverage being given to avian influenza. Further, the UK poultry industry is playing down reports of any negative impact associated with the reported increase in imports of poultry meat from the affected Member States.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
London [UK1]
[UK]

The UK Government's Chief Scientific Advisor, Professor Sir David King, has acknowledged that he expects H5N1 Avian Influenza (AI) to arrive in the UK but does not expect any such outbreak to be on the scale of the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak. His comments to the National Farmers Union (NFU) annual conference on February 27, 2005 dovetail with earlier statements by the UK Government's Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra). On February 22, 2006 Defra's Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer, Fred Landeg, made a statement emphasizing that Defra's priority is to ensure that they would be able to eradicate an outbreak of avian influenza as quickly and effectively as possible. However, he emphasized the importance of spotting the disease early and asked that all people that keep poultry and other domestic birds should remain vigilant for signs of the disease and all keepers should maintain a high level of biosecurity to reduce the risk of introducing the disease.

In accordance with EU regulations, Defra has a highly detailed contingency plan to deal with an outbreak. Last updated in December 2005, its Exotic Animal Disease Generic Contingency Plan covers Foot and Mouth Disease, AI, Newcastle Disease & Classical Swine Fever. For AI, Defra would first order all poultry indoors when it is detected in either wild or domestic UK flocks. If AI is detected in a domestic flock, the flock will be destroyed and a series of protection and surveillance zones, governing the movement of poultry, will be established around the infected farm. The full 304 page plan is available at:

www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/fmd/pdf/genericcp.pdf

With the subject of AI never far from the headlines, the UK Government's stance on vaccination is again in the spotlight. As it demonstrated during the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak, it does not support automatic mass vaccination in the event of an animal disease outbreak. Speaking at the NFU annual conference on February 27, 2005, Defra Secretary of State, Margaret Beckett, did however emphasize that vaccination in the event of an AI outbreak has not been totally ruled out. As the vaccination of nearly a million free range ducks and geese began in south-west France, Mrs. Beckett questioned the effectiveness of vaccination in preventing virus spread, stating "there is a question about how effective it could be - whether it is likely to mask the disease and decrease its spread rather than prevent it.....We don't rule it out, we do keep it under review."

Defra continues to maintain detailed avian influenza pages on its website which are regularly updated with guidance and advice on control measures and the latest situation. These include information on Defra's vaccination policy and are available at:

www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/disease/ai/index.htm

Also included on this website is Defra's guidance to organic producers issued on February 23, 2006 regarding the compulsory housing of birds. Following concerns expressed by organic producers and trade bodies including the Soil Association, an organic certification body, Defra has clarified that the organic status of poultry flocks would not be affected should operators be required under the law to restrict access to open air runs as a precaution against AI. The Soil Association would like to allow free range birds to remain outdoors during an AI outbreak and be vaccinated. However, most large scale farmers agree with Defra's position.

While the media furor surrounding avian influenza continues unabated, UK consumption of poultry meat is showing no sign of decline unlike in some other Member States including Italy (IT6010) and France (FR6013). According to the British Poultry Council's Chief Executive, Peter Bradnock, there has been no discernable evidence of a decline in sales. As for the main reasons, Mr. Bradnock cites the good reputation of the Food Standards Agency

(FSA), which continues to emphasize that AI is not a food safety issue, the trust consumers put in the retailers and a number of price promotions introduced by the latter to support sales volumes. Regarding the reported increase in imports of poultry meat from the likes of Italy and France in the past few weeks, Mr. Bradnock explained that this meat has largely been destined for the relatively small wholesale trade but, contrary to some media reports, this has had little to no effect on domestic production decisions of UK poultry producers. Mr. Bradnock's views are largely supported by Charles Bourns, Chairman of the National Farmers Union (NFU) poultry board, who indicates that there is currently a shortage of home-produced broiler meat and so the market can absorb some surplus from the rest of Europe. Of course, the consumer's faith in poultry meat, and the assurances of both Government and industry, will not be fully tested until AI is confirmed in the UK.